

A Concentrator's Guide to Reading and Writing in Social Anthropology

ANTHROPOLOGY 97Z, SOPHOMORE TUTORIAL



HARVARD
COLLEGE

A Concentrator's Guide to Reading and Writing Social Anthropology

ANTHROPOLOGY 97Z, SOPHOMORE TUTORIAL

By: Smita Lahiri, Lilith Mahmud & James Herron

Cover image: Xiongnu textile

Copyright 2008, President and Fellows of Harvard

A Concentrator's Guide to Reading and Writing Social Anthropology

ANTHROPOLOGY 97Z, SOPHOMORE TUTORIAL

by Smita Lahiri, Lilith Mahmud & James Herron

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5
Reading Anthropological Literature.....	6
Essays.....	6
Book-length Ethnographies.....	7
Moves Anthropologists Make	10
Entering a Conversation.....	11
Readying One's Tools.....	12
Authorizing.....	13
Borrowing and Extending.....	15
Countering.....	15
Going Meta.....	16
Writing Assignments: Types and Strategies.....	19
Response Papers: An Informal Formality.....	19
The Nebulous and Open-Ended: Pitfalls of the "Short-Long" Essay.....	21
Taming the Term Paper Monster.....	23
Bibliographic Research Tips.....	27
Nota Bene: Using and Citing Sources.....	29
Other Writing Support Resources.....	30



I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Social Anthropology 97z. This course is intended to induct social anthropology concentrators into the world of a discipline so varied that its practitioners may be found in Japanese fish markets, Argentine labs, Lebanese bars, Indonesian photography studios, East St. Louis neighborhoods, Thai temples, and Brazilian *favelas*— to name just a small sampling of the ethnographic locales studied by Harvard faculty and students, past as well as present. Despite the conceptual and physical distance amongst its sites of study, the coherence of social anthropology stems from its distinctive intellectual frameworks, methods, and lively internal debates conducted around shared passions and inquiries. The sophomore tutorial serves as your point of entry into some of these disciplinary conversations, and the mission of this guide is to offers tips and guidelines that will make it easier for you to join them.

While it is often and rightly stressed that ethnographic field research lies at the heart of the discipline of social anthropology, scholarly publication is its life-blood: it is chiefly through writing that most anthropologists disseminate the results of their time in the field. Writing transforms data and personal observations into texts that inform, provoke, and inspire debate and conversations amongst anthropologists and members of allied disciplines, and at times even reach public arenas beyond the university. This guide starts from the position that the writing practices and conventions of anthropologists are not always transparent, and that engaging with the questions, data, and conclusions found in anthropological texts is not a self-evident task. Keeping in mind your position as a newcomer navigating an unfamiliar disciplinary culture, we have tried to demystify some of the challenges you may encounter. As you read the texts assigned for this course and engage them in your own essays, immersing yourself vicariously in the fieldwork of other scholars, we hope you will find your own appetite for conducting — and writing up — ethnographic research being whetted.

II. READING ANTHROPOLOGICAL LITERATURE

If you are taking several anthropology courses at the same time, the reading load may appear daunting or even overwhelming. The truth is that it does not need to be so, even though it is not uncommon for upper-division undergraduate anthropology classes to assign over 200 pages to read in any given week. In this section of the guide we will examine the major forms of publication in social anthropology that you are likely to encounter in your courses and suggest some strategies for reading them more effectively.

Essays on a single subject are one of the primary vehicles through which scholars present their research and ideas to the academic community, adding to existing knowledge through innovation and debate. They are generally published in journals or in edited volumes that are focused on a single topic. Most of the essays/journal articles you will read in your classes will probably fall into one of the following two categories:

Essays

- **Programmatic essays.** These essays (sometimes misleadingly referred to as “theoretical essays”) examine a specific issue in anthropology and suggest new directions for future research. For instance, Sherry Ortner’s (1974) essay “Is female to male as nature is to culture?” argued that the universality of female subordination across all known human societies should be viewed as a reflection of ideological preoccupations found in all cultures, and not as an outcome of biological determination. Programmatic essays offer an overview of key positions and arguments, frequently capturing ongoing shifts in how a major topic is being conceptualized and researched. The fact that the authors of programmatic essays tend to draw upon a wide range of literature (rather than relying solely upon their own research findings) makes them particularly informative in this regard.

Since programmatic essays by their very nature address topical issues and dilemmas, they tend to become superseded by later work. Sometimes, however, the very “datedness” of an essay becomes part of its overall significance. For instance, Ortner’s essay is still widely read and assigned, even though her concepts of “culture” and even “gender” have been thoroughly challenged and revised since the time of its writing. For all its datedness, however, it still stands as a landmark essay (which is quite different from a period piece.)

- **Research Articles.** A research article poses and addresses a question or problem that arises out of previous scholarship or from the author’s own data (generally collected in the field or in the course of archival research). Such research reports tend to be relatively self-contained, although the majority of authors do intend for their arguments to be applicable or illuminating in the context of other, comparable settings.

The distinction we make here is not carved in stone. By drawing it, we hope to flag for your attention the fact that scholarly essays range widely in their ambitions for producing generalizable knowledge: some are primarily oriented towards reporting on research, while others seek to chalk out a program of wide-ranging scope and significance. You may find it illuminating to discern and analyze the author's ambitions in this regard. Is she primarily attempting to account for a particular set of circumstances and/or events? Or is she seeking to develop concepts or approaches that can be applied to comparable situations elsewhere?

An example of a research report that is simultaneously programmatic in scope is J. Lorand Matory's (1999) article entitled "The English Professors of Brazil." Here, Matory re-examines the widely accepted notion that Brazilian Candomblé (an Afro-Latin American religion) is based upon preserved cultural memories brought to the New World from Yoruba and other regions by enslaved Africans. Matory uses his own research on the circulation of free black travelers across the Atlantic Ocean to argue that much of what is often seen as "purely African" about Candomblé was actually formulated through inter-regional exchanges between Nigeria and Brazil in the nineteenth century, i.e., relatively recently. Potentially, the article could prove very useful to scholars of other regions or topics who are studying the circulation and agency of diasporic persons, or the ways in which local cultures can develop under influences that do not obey political and geographic boundaries.

In addition to programmatic essays and research reports, it is worth mentioning the following:

- **Book Reviews and Review Articles.** While *book reviews* are unlikely to form part of your required course readings, you should consult them whenever you need help understanding or contextualizing an ethnography or monograph. Book reviews in anthropology journals succinctly address the scope and contribution of a specific work, allowing you to get a "quick fix" on its contents and how it was received by other scholars upon its publication. Single book reviews should not be confused with *review articles*, which provide an in-depth overview of scholarship on a given topic. The latter are particularly useful to consult in the early stages of the essay-writing process, when you are trying to develop a feel for the key ideas and debates surrounding a particular topic.

Book Length Ethnographies

We now turn to book-length ethnographies, the signature publications of anthropological research.

- **Ethnographies.** As you are probably aware, "ethnography" refers not only to a specific way of doing research — immersing oneself in a naturally-occurring social setting — but also to the book-length genre of scholarly writing in which such research often culminates. Since you will

most likely not be conducting ethnographic fieldwork for the sophomore tutorial, here we will be concerned primarily with how to become an engaged and generous (though not uncritical) reader of ethnographic writing.

Ethnography is a rather unusual genre of academic writing because it combines analytical argumentation with detailed, evocative descriptions of the people and communities that are the subjects of the research. If you are new to anthropology, you may find the mixture of objective and subjective stances displayed in ethnographies frustrating and difficult to parse. For instance, your prior notions of what qualitative research or social science ought to look like may be jarred when you read an ethnographer's discussion of how his gender, ethnicity, intellectual stances or sexual orientation shaped the direction of his research and its conclusions. In fact, such concerns are not at all out of place in the human sciences, whose key difference from natural sciences lies in dealing with value-laden data (like behaviors and symbols), which, by their very definition require interpretation. An interpretation, after all, is not a view from nowhere but one that is necessarily grounded in a specific position.

Alternatively, you may become so caught up in what Clifford Geertz calls "thick description" — in the personalities and events populating the world of the text — that you are at a loss to discern how the ethnographer uses these evocative details as data points for building an argument. But just as it takes a trained ear to apprehend the role of various musical parts within the performance of a symphonic work, so too with practice you will be able to discern the elements of description, narration, and argument in a given ethnography as well as to assess the author's success in fitting them together. Here are some of the hallmarks of ethnographic genre to keep in mind:

- ***Ethnographies are assemblages of heterogeneous data types.*** Page through almost any book-length ethnography, and you will realize that the author has tried hard to seamlessly interweave a heterogeneous range of materials. You may find many or all of the following: maps, tables, photographs, personal narrative, transcripts of interviews, references to secondary literature, and excerpts from archival documents, media reports, vernacular texts, and other primary sources. Most of these materials may represent "qualitative" data but "quantitative" facts and figures may also be included. Some of the information presented may be "objective" in the sense of being independently verifiable, while a large portion of the evidence may appear to rest entirely upon the author's idiosyncratic experiences and observations. A good reader will pay attention to the way in which these various types of data reinforce (or contradict) other, while assessing each form of evidence on its own terms.

• ***Argumentation in ethnographies tends to be embedded and cumulative.***

Ethnographies are not like legal briefs or philosophical papers that meticulously spell out their premises, warrants, and conclusions; neither are they like those kinds of novels or travelogues that command your attention only for the time that you are reading them. Because the argument of an ethnography is worked out throughout its narrative arc, you will need to preview, read, and distill the point of each chapter in order to discern whether the book succeeds in executing the author's intentions. These intentions are often made explicit in the introduction, moving back and forth between foreground and background during subsequent chapters before becoming highlighted once again in the conclusion. Your reading will be more effective — and efficient — if you tailor your focus to different sections of the book: skimming some sections, closely reading (and re-reading) others, and underlining or highlighting key terms, phrases and claims that recur throughout.



*Black Carnival group performs on streets of Belmonte, Brazil.
Photo by Michael Baran.*

• ***Ethnographies reward readings that are both generous and critically engaged.*** An ethnography typically seeks to evoke a local social world. To enter that world, you need to accept the author's *bona fides* and the portrait he has painstakingly sketched, at least until your instincts as a reader provide you with ample evidence to doubt them. Paying attention to your own responses — Where is your attention gripped? Where does it flag? Where do you find yourself skeptical or wanting more information?— will provide you with a sound basis for assessing both the strengths and weaknesses of the book.



Miners report for work at the Valenciana mine in Guanajuato, Mexico, 1997.
Photo by Stephen Ferry.

III. MOVES ANTHROPOLOGISTS MAKE

When it comes to writing papers for the Sophomore Tutorial as well as for other anthropology courses, the general principles of good expository writing — using and attributing sources appropriately, motivating and developing an argument, and crafting an effective organizational structure — still apply. Too often, however, student writers expend their writing energies on the conventional elements an essay is supposed to *contain* — introduction, thesis statement, body, and conclusion — and lose sight of what they intend these elements to *do*. In a helpful book entitled *Rewriting*, composition scholar Joseph Harris suggests paying attention to *writing moves* — textual strategies that authors employ to engage with ideas and to move them in new directions — as a way for students to make their own reading and writing practices more dynamic.

Each academic discipline has its characteristic *writing moves* to which practitioners turn in order to engage with pre-existing knowledge claims and to formulate new ones. Anthropology is no exception. In this section of the guide, we list out and unpack six moves that are commonly encountered in prose written by anthropologists. Some moves may be found especially often in the opening paragraphs of an essay; others in the body or conclusion. Nevertheless, these moves do not map neatly onto the linear essay structure mentioned above, for the conceptual work they accomplish may be required at any point in the argument.

Of course, the moves catalogued below can also be found in writings by non-anthropologists; equally, if one were to scrutinize closely any piece of writing by an anthropologist for its moves, many more than these six would undoubtedly come to light. As long as you keep these provisos

in mind, you should nevertheless find this list useful for identifying the strategies that make for effective anthropological writing and incorporating them in their own writing. And remember: the moves that characterize superior published scholarship are the very ones that can make for strong and compelling student essays!

1. Entering a Conversation

“Entering a conversation” is our term for the indispensable move of establishing a context for one’s ideas and the motivation for expounding them. Broadly speaking, “entering a conversation” involves letting the reader know which intellectual conversations you propose to join and what contribution you hope to make.

Consider the following example from Jeff Leopando’s final paper for the sophomore tutorial:

In this paper, I argue that the Arnold Arboretum offers an interesting case for analysis because, in contrast to many other natural spaces that anthropologists have studied, it is a site where the myths of “wilderness” and “a historical” nature are *dispelled* rather than reproduced. At the Arboretum, nature is presented as domesticated rather than wild, and deeply intertwined with human history rather than divorced from it.

This paragraph, which appears on page 2 of a 15-page paper, sets the stage for an anthropologically informed analysis of the Harvard Arnold Arboretum. By pointing out ways in which the Arnold Arboretum differs from other exemplary ecological sites, the student writer anticipates the contribution he plans to make to previous discussions of how nature becomes constructed or elaborated in cultural artifacts. Specifically, the writer makes an implicit reference to a body of literature on the anthropology of the environment (“natural spaces that anthropologists have studied”), thus situating his own ideas within an established intellectual framework. Moreover, he promises the reader an interesting case study that will challenge certain assumptions and findings within this literature. This serves not only as a ‘hook’ for catching the reader’s attention, but also as a means of highlighting the originality of the author’s point of view and suggesting where the paper’s overall contribution lies.

Entry into the field

Book-length ethnographies often begin with a scene-setting move that describes the geographical and social landscape of the group, village, city, organization, network, or community in which the study took place. A classic example of 'entry into the field' is the opening to Bronislaw Malinowski's (1984) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*:

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which brought you sails away out of sight. Since you take up your abode in the compound of some neighbouring white man, trader or missionary, you have nothing to do, but to start at once on your ethnographic work. Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. For the white man is temporarily absent, or else unable or unwilling to waste any of his time on you. This exactly describes my first initiation into field work on the south coast of New Guinea.¹

Such evocations of the anthropologist's 'entry into the field' not only serve to sketch out the social world of the ethnography but also establish the ultimate basis of the writer's trustworthiness: his actual presence and positioning within that world's specific milieu.

2. Readyng One's Tools

To craft their arguments, academic authors often borrow and adapt key terms and concepts from a variety of disciplines and intellectual frameworks. In a move that we call *readyng one's tools*, authors customarily offer brief explanation of the concept's original context and significance, as well as their own reasons for borrowing it.

Our first example of this move is taken from the second page of an article by Smita Lahiri, one of the authors of this guide:

The work of Michel Foucault has attuned scholars to the ways in which all configurations of knowledge authorize distinctive "enunciative modalities." To speak from or through discourse is to claim for one's enunciations an authority whose ultimate source lies not in oneself, but rather in a structure of statements embedded in and institutionally validated by a field of power relations. This, I argue, aptly describes the situation of at least one popular-religious leader at Mt. Banahaw, who has been extensively figured as an embodiment of primordial national culture in academic scholarship and journalistic

¹Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1985. *Argonauts Of The Western Pacific*. Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press. p.4.

writings within the Philippines' papers of record.²

Here, the author first introduces her readers to the term “enunciative modalities,” glossing it briefly and crediting its originator, Michel Foucault. Next, she explains the purpose for which she’s borrowing the term, offering enough detail to lure the reader’s attention back from Foucault to her own subject, but not so much as to overwhelm him at this initial stage of the essay.

Our second example of comes from the final paper of a student in the sophomore tutorial, Curtis Chan:

B-boying is a dance, and as such it is a performance in the popular understanding of the term. B-boying is also, however, something more than a dance—a performance beyond this limited understanding. The popular understanding of a performance often evokes images of a stage, of a theater, with choreographed lighting and sound. Richard Schechner, however, calls upon a broader notion of performance. Largely recognized as the founder of the academic, cross-disciplinary area of performance studies, Schechner writes that there is “no historically or culturally fixable limit to what is or is not ‘performance’” (2002:2). According to another performance theorist, Deborah Klens-Bigman, performance exists wherever an action is done fore an audience, even if the audience is not before the performer but within the performer himself. By this notion, then, the way that b-boys walk, talk, and watch their fellow dancers is a performance.

In this passage, the writer successfully accomplishes two moves at once. After first using b-boying as his point of entry into a conversation with key figures in performance studies, he then readies his conceptual tools by distinguishing commonsense and specialist notions of “performance” and by assimilating the practice of b-boying to latter sense of the term.

3. Authorizing

Anthropologists employ a diverse range of textual strategies to establish themselves as credible authorities on their respective subjects. Describing one’s entry into the field can serve as an effective *authorizing* move; so can displaying a command of the relevant secondary literature, explaining one’s positioning vis-à-vis the people who were the subjects of one’s research, or elaborating upon the established authority of somebody else. Consider the following excerpt from Jeff Leopando’s final paper that set out to analyze the Arnold Arboretum from an anthropological perspective:

² Smita Lahiri, “The Priestess and the Politician: Enunciating Filipino Cultural Nationalism through Mt. Banahaw,” in Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth George, eds., *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2005), p 24.

Charles W. Eliot, the President of Harvard during the early years of the Arnold Arboretum, wrote about it in one of his yearly reports:

[t]he natural woods and the systematic collections attract the attention of the greater part of these visitors chiefly for their beauty, which varies with the succession of the seasons; but here is a considerable number of visitors on foot who visit the Arboretum for study combined with enjoyment” (Eliot 1895:30).

His comment underscores a duality that has defined the Arboretum from its inception; it is a place that is at once “natural” and “systematic” — a site for both the “enjoyment” and the “study” of nature.

Here, the writer’s use of a quote from a former President of Harvard University — a prominent figure in the history of the Arboretum — lends credence to his own characterization of the arboretum’s dual aspect.

Our next example of *authorizing* comes from *Yemen Chronicle*, a book written by Harvard anthropology Professor Steven Caton,

I assumed at the time that there was such a thing as an “authentic” tribal poetry, whose heart beat in a rural and seemingly remote setting such as Khawlan al-Tiyal and not in a complex urban setting such as Sana’a (where later I fact I would study the works of many tribal poets, who had migrated from Yemen’s drought-stricken countryside to enlist in the army or become taxi drivers or private security guards). But after only six months, I realized how simplistic that assumption was. The urban-rural dichotomy and the cultural dichotomy of tribal-nontribal, not to speak of the political one of state-nonstate were, if not exactly wrong, then misleading. For example, the “hottest” tribal poet in Yemen in 1979, Muhamman al-Gharsi, whose cassette tapes sold out before everyone else’s in the stereo stores, had his main residence in Sana’a, where he was in the army.³

At first glance, this writer’s acknowledgment of the shortcomings of his initial notions regarding tribal poetry might seem like an unlikely instance of an authorizing move. Nevertheless, by revealing to his readers the humbling experience of finding his preconceptions falsified by empirical reality, the author establishes the authenticity of his field research, lending greater credibility to the knowledge claims that he will subsequently advance. Incidentally, this passage also illustrates a classic device in anthropological writing: the use of a “lightbulb moment” to succinctly evoke an incremental process of discovery. The example of the urban tribal poet of Sana’a crisply shows the reader why Caton was forced to rethink the relationship between rurality

³Steven Caton, *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation* (New York: Vintage), 13.

and tribal poetry — something which actually took him “only” six months to do!

4. Borrowing and Extending

Our fourth move, *borrowing and extending*, is somewhat similar to *readying one's tools* in that it entails turning key terms or ideas from other works to one's own purposes. But whereas the tool-readying move is often used to situate the overall purpose of one's writing in relation to one or more pre-existing intellectual frameworks, *borrowing and extending* more aptly describes how writers advance an overarching argument by elaborating local claims or supporting arguments. Consider the following example from anthropology professor Michael Herzfeld's (2004) book on artisanship training in Greece, entitled *The Body Impolitic*:

Asking who says that the artisans' and their apprentices' values need readjusting... is a way of investigating the invisible structure of [the global hierarchy of value]. It allows us to ask why working-class boys compound their entrapment by viewing escape from their class identity as not only difficult but also undesirable. These are also questions that Willis has asked, but asking them in the Greek context reorients the investigation to larger patterns of [global] domination... In asking questions similar to those Willis posed about the self-reproduction of working class culture in Britain, I have instead chosen to explore these matters among artisan-instructors who are reproducing their own sense of inhabited class identity, and who are also reproducing a sense of regional and national humiliation.⁴

Here Herzfeld draws upon Willis' account of the reproduction of working class male identities in Britain to make a similar argument about Greek artisans. But note that Herzfeld is not just *borrowing* Willis' theory in order to apply it in a different context; he is also *extending* its implications from the national level to the transnational European and global levels.

5. Countering

To *counter* is not only (or even necessarily) to criticize, although a well-informed critique of another's work may certainly form part of it. The true purpose of *countering*, however, is to enhance your readers' understanding of a topic by identifying and addressing weaknesses in how it has been previously understood.

That masculinity and maleness are socially constructed, then, means that there is nothing natural about these notions. Senelick puts forth Marianne Wex's contention that gender is not natural or biological but rather historical. He writes, “Centuries of social pressure... have frozen men and women into these physical classifiers of gender” (1992: x). But even this statement seems to indicate that the notion of gender and by extension the notion

⁴Herzfeld, Michael. 2003. *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.24

of manhood and masculinity is “frozen,” static, and the same across the world, whereas in fact it is none of these things. To speak of “masculinity,” one must not assume that there is a singular masculinity but rather that there are multiple masculinities and multiple performative manifestations of these masculinities.

In this, our second excerpt from a sophomore tutorial paper on b-boying, we find the writer, Curtis Chan, *countering* a static and frozen notion of gender through a survey of some of the literature in gender studies. Countering can also take the form of pointing out shortcomings in commonsense notions and categories. Harvard anthropology professor Kimberly Theidon, for instance, employs this common and effective strategy of anthropological writing in the following excerpt from a published journal article:

Women remained responsible for maintaining the home in the face of the dual challenges of political violence and the poverty that was sharply exacerbated by the war. . . I argue that although survival may be “less dramatic” than armed struggle, an analysis of the domestic economy of war reveals the extent to which survival in itself becomes a daily struggle. . . As the members of the mother’s club in Purus related, “We were so sad because we could not feed our children well. Our children cried for food, and it is the mother who must do something.” What the interviews with these women underscore is the implicit acknowledgment of women’s central role not only in production but also in social reproduction—both threatened during the war, putting mere survival in doubt.⁵

By deconstructing commonsense notions of struggle, Theidon advances her argument that Peruvian peasants caught up in militant opposition to the state have understood “war” not just as armed combat but as a more comprehensive struggle for survival. Note that this *countering* move rests, in turn, on another *authorizing* move, in which Theidon asserts her prerogative to interpret the speech her informants regarding their participation in militancy.

6. Going Meta

While many anthropologists are reluctant to generalize from their findings to contexts with which they are not familiar, they undoubtedly seek to make their knowledge claims relevant to (and usable by) their audiences. *Going meta* entails framing or stepping back from the particularities of a case study or research topic in order to establish its overall significance. Authors often use phrases such as “In sum, I argue that...” or “in this paper, I have examined...” to flag this move. *Going meta* may also be accompanied by a *qualifying* move, in which an author acknowledges the limits of his or her claims (e.g., “I do not mean to imply...;” or “I am not suggesting...”). These

⁵ From Kimberly Theidon, “Disarming the Subject: Remembering War and Imagining Citizenship in Peru.” *Cultural Critique* 54 (2003), 67-87., p. 75.

qualifications are an integral part of *going meta* because they help define the overall scope and significance of what the writer has accomplished. Consider the following example:

Systems of racial thinking vary considerably across cultures and historic time. My proposal neither denies this variability nor implies that it is trivial. Nor am I suggesting that racial thinking is impervious to the cultural and political environments. Indeed, racial thinking is literally unthinkable in the absence of such environments. Something, and typically it is a system of cultural belief, channels an abstract set of expectations about human difference onto a specific range of differences and a specific way to viewing them. In some, in fact in many, social formations this turns out to be racial. But the range of ways of interpreting raciality vary considerably, and therefore the way these abstract principles derive substance varies accordingly. Some systems, like the contemporary North American one, focus on visible and dramatic differences in appearance. Other systems, like the mid century German one, draw more attention to public sociology than to accessible morphology.⁶

Here, Lawrence Hirschfeld *qualifies* the scope of his argument by anticipating two likely misinterpretations of his ideas and denying that these are in fact implications of his argument. In other words, Hirschfeld *qualifies* his argument by showing its relationship to widely held anthropological views on race. In the latter part of the paragraph Hirschfeld goes on to suggest that his proposals are in fact consonant with the manifest variety in racial ideologies in the world, again qualifying the scope of his argument.

⁶ From Lawrence Hirschfeld, 1997, "The Conceptual Politics of Race: Lessons from Our Children" *Ethos* v. 25 n. 1, pp. 63-92

Tips for recognizing anthropological moves

- 1) Read the Introduction (or sometimes "Chapter One") for an explicit discussion of the literature the author is drawing from as an intellectual framework (entering a conversation).
- 2) In Chapter One (or early on), look for the 'entry into the field' scene. How does the author present a scene that is so typical of the ethnographic genre? (entering a conversation, authorizing).
- 3) Somewhere in the ethnographic sections, there is usually a scene in which the anthropologist gains insider status, and is thus finally made to feel as a member of the community (authorizing).
- 4) Look for key terminology. Is there a word or phrase that the writer has defined towards the beginning and has then used to analyze the material throughout? (readying one's tools).
- 5) Does the author discuss other anthropological literature about the same area or topic? How does he or she relate to the existing literature? (borrowing/extending, countering, going meta).
- 6) Look for moments of reflexivity, wherein the author explores his or her own positioning relative to research questions and informants and consider how such moments affect the credibility of the data and /or claims being advanced (authorizing, qualifying, going meta).
- 7) Read closely some of the ethnographic scenes. How are informants' voices represented, through direct quotes or paraphrases? What contextual information about informants does the author provide? (authorizing)

IV. WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: TYPES AND STRATEGIES

The written assignments for the sophomore tutorial may include several or all of the following: short weekly response papers of a page or two, one or more lengthier essays whose topics may be assigned or left to your choosing, and an individually-designed research paper due at the end of the term. In this section of the guide, we will cover some key issues to keep in mind as you approach these assignments. These include arriving at a motivation for writing, defining and delimiting the subject and the argument of your essay, reading between the lines of assigned topics, conducting research, and consulting with advisors.

Response Papers: An Informal Formality

Many professors require regular response papers from their students as a way of insuring that students arrive in class having read and seriously engaged with the assigned reading. Response papers may even be circulated amongst your peers, giving you the chance to receive informal feedback. Because most teachers genuinely want students to speculate and take risks with new ideas even when they may not be 100% certain of being on solid ground, response papers are often graded relatively informally (e.g. using the “check” system). But make no mistake: these assignments are not throwaways. Writing response papers give you a chance to practice and improve important skills of summary, analysis, and critique that will be crucial to the success of your longer, higher-stakes essays. And no matter how “informal” your writing style, you should always avoid sentence fragments, check your grammar, and back up any claims with quotations or page references.

Balance Summary and Analysis

One of the challenges posed by response papers is striking an effective balance between summary and analysis. These two aspects should be closely integrated (i.e., you should avoid having a section called “summary” and a section called “analysis”); without either element, your response paper will be incomplete.

It is important that you provide a well-crafted **summary** because this will show your instructor that you have indeed done the readings. Moreover, if your summary refers both to the overall arc of the reading as well as to some of its most crucial details, your instructor will know that you were an attentive reader. However, your summary should not occupy more than one third to one half of your response paper. The majority of your writing should be analytical.

The **analysis** you will conduct in your response paper will depend on how many readings you are required to address. If you are dealing with a single book-length work (usually an ethnography), you will need to provide, first of all, an overall critical assessment of its contributions and shortcomings. Secondly, you will also have to devote part of your response paper to some specific

aspect of the book that you found interesting, troubling, or especially revelatory. This could be a corollary argument the author proposes, an ethnographic vignette, or a theme that relates this book to the history of anthropology or to other themes discussed in the course.

In many anthropology courses, however, you will often be assigned various articles or book excerpts to read in the same week, rather than a single book. In this case, your response paper will need to address simultaneously the texts of different authors. Once again, your instructor might set some guidelines for your course, but in general there are some options when responding to multiple texts at once:

1. Focus on one main text, and refer to the others to enrich your analysis of the main text.
2. Compare and contrast all texts. Thinking about why your instructor put these readings together in the syllabus, examine how each speaks to a central theme and/or to each other.
3. Choose a narrow question that is relevant to the course or to that week, and use the readings to develop possible answers to it.

The *Précis*: a type of response paper

Instead of a generic response paper, some courses might ask you to write a “*précis*.” A *précis* is an interpretive summary, which requires you to integrate closely the summary and the analysis parts of your response paper. As you will discover, *précis*-writing is an invaluable preparatory step for writing an argumentative essay, or for discussing a text orally in class. More than just offering a set of notes on the contents of a text, a *précis* connects those contents to the text’s argumentative structure and presentational strategy. The format and objective of *précis*-writing may vary across the disciplines. In the context of an ethnography, the task of a *précis* is to concisely recap the author’s main argument(s) and key supporting points, as well as the overall arc and most important turns of his/her narrative.

The first component of your *précis* should be a statement of the main issues or problems addressed by the text. Is the book primarily concerned with a specific group of people and their interlocked set of beliefs? With their institutions and codes of behavior? With specific events and their repercussions? While all these elements may be present in the text, they are not equally important. It is your job to discern which concerns are pre-eminent and which are hierarchically subordinated to others — in part by paying attention the author’s explicit cues, and in part by comparing them to the claims and evidence s/he presents.

Next, your *précis* should discuss the text’s logic or pattern of development. It may be helpful to study carefully the table of contents, as you try to understand the narrative structure of the text. Here, for illustrative purposes, are two templates for sentences that discuss logical patterns: “By examining the sources of _____, the author shows the consequences of _____”; “In

order to _____, the text shows the interrelationship between _____ and _____ .” Typical verbs indicating such logic include compare, contrast, link causally, cause, and follow from. In this part of the précis, you should illustrate the author’s logical moves by summarizing key information from the text, supplying page references wherever possible. Here, as you look over the ethnography for evidence, you will find it useful to ask yourself what categories of information are being supplied by the narrative and expository sections of the text. Possible categories of information might include the following: characteristics of events, groups, or subgroups; stages in an event or process; limitations, restrictions, or other constraints upon the research process.

By following these steps, you will undoubtedly sharpen your skills at culling out and summarizing the most crucial aspects of the text. You will also have found a direction for the third component of your précis: critical analysis and interpretation. Here, you will draw out the implications of the text (backed up by page references, as usual) and advance your own assertions or questions about it. In setting up the narrative (or argument) in a specific way, what has the author overlooked, asserted, or brushed aside? What seems novel or conventional about the inferences or arguments of the text?

The Nebulous and the Open-Ended: Pitfalls of the “Short Long” Essay

Another type of assignment might be called the nebulous paper in which you are asked to write a paper on some theme (say, the relationship between gender and globalization) but are not provided with a specific question to answer or otherwise given much guidance about how to approach the assignment. Alternatively, the assignment may provide a question, but the question is overly broad for a short long essay and really does little more than suggest a topic or theme.

Faced with such an assignment, the first thing you should do is verify that the assignment is indeed as open-ended as it appears to be. Sometimes instructors provide a nebulous paper prompt but in fact have a specific question or set of questions in mind that they would like students to address in the essay. It’s best to ask about this.

If the assignment is truly open-ended, the crucial thing to keep in mind is that a topic is not a yet a question or problem that you can usefully address in an essay. You cannot write a paper about gender and globalization, which is a huge and ill-defined area of inquiry; rather you need to identify some specific question or problem under the broad heading of gender and globalization that can be tackled in your paper. In other words, just because a paper assignment does not provide you with a specific question to answer does not absolve you of the need to come up with one. How then do you arrive at a problematic or question to address in the paper?

A good place to start is often your instructor’s presentation of the material you are writing about, or issues that have come up during class discussion. Often class discussions will gravitate toward

'live' or contested issues, research problems, or scholarly debates that might form the basis of a specific paper problematic. The readings assigned for the relevant part of the course might also suggest debates, contradictions, puzzles or tensions that could form the basis of a question. If you know the source texts well but are still perplexed or annoyed by some aspect of them, often such perplexity and annoyance points to some difficulty in the texts that might be worth sorting out in a paper.

Even when the paper assignment is quite vague, your paper still needs to take a specific argumentative form. There are several broad argument types in anthropology that you might consider as you try to figure out an approach to a thematic or nebulous paper assignment. Common essay types in anthropology include:

- ***Intervening in a scholarly debate.*** Here you stake out an original position in a scholarly debate by weighing the plausibility of various other positions and making the case for one point of view or, even better, formulating your own hybrid or novel position.
- ***Testing a theory with evidence.*** You can take a theoretical framework and test it by putting it to work on ethnographic or some other sort of cultural evidence. The basic question for this sort of essay is: Does the theory produce the insights that it is supposed to produce? If not, how would the theory need to be revised in order to work better?
- ***A lens essay.*** The lens paper is a variation of the test-a-theory paper in which you take a theoretical or interpretive framework (Goffman's notion of a 'frame,' say) and apply it to new material. The lens paper differs from a test-a-theory paper in that the emphasis is less on evaluating the theory (whether 'frame' is a useful analytical concept) than on interpreting the evidence in a new way.
- ***Comparing theories, methodologies, texts, or approaches.*** In this sort of essay you attempt to reveal non-obvious relationships between theories, texts, etc. by comparing them along some relevant dimension. You might find for instance that although two texts advance contradictory claims, they actually make similar underlying assumptions and are not so at odds as they might first appear.
- ***Questioning the assumptions of an argument or text.*** Any argument assumes some things to be true and not in need of defense or analysis. You can identify the assumptions embraced by a particular argument and scrutinize them. In doing so you can uncover non-obvious implications of an argument or text.

- **Recontextualizing a theory or claim.**

Anthropological writing often draws on arguments made in one particular social context (say, an argument about gift giving in Japan) and extends them to new cultural material.

There are, of course, many other types of arguments in anthropological writing, although many fall loosely into the categories adduced above. The crucial thing to keep in mind is that the nebulous paper assignment should not be treated as license to write a nebulous paper. Your paper still needs to articulate a specific question or problematic and a specific, arguable thesis that addresses the question.

Taming the Term Paper Monster

Term papers in anthropology requiring original or independent research may be (at the discretion of the professor) anywhere from 10 to a daunting 25 pages in length. In preparing to write such a paper, you will confront several challenges: choosing a topic that satisfies the aims of the course while reflecting your own interests; delimiting the subject matter in order to arrive at a manageable focus and motivation, building your knowledge of the topic through research and analysis, and getting approval for your topic and preliminary feedback on your ideas from advisors.

Choose A Topic

One way to go about choosing a topic is to start with something covered in class. Was there an assigned reading that you found particularly intriguing? Did one of the sections of the syllabus touch on an issue you have always wanted to learn more about? You can start with a text or texts from the class and ask yourself what made them stand out for you. Was it the writing style? The subject matter? An intellectual debate they were contributing to? Once you have pinpointed your interests, you can start to explore and define them further through additional research. Although you should eventually investigate many resources beyond the Internet, you can start researching from your PC using online search engines such as Google Scholar. Harvard library databases like Lexis Nexis and Proquest are also helpful resources. Don't neglect either scholarly literature in anthropology or information-rich mass media reports.



*Traders packing up orders at the end of the day in a wholesale clothing market, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.
Photo by Ann Marie Leshkovich.*

Example: Use Course Materials as your Point of Departure

Perhaps the course introduced you to the study of kinship, covering not only the mysterious terminology that anthropologists have developed to distinguish patrilineal cross-cousin marriage from virilocal endogamy but also the dilemmas and challenges of constructing kinship in nontraditional ways, such as within gay families. Perhaps, over the summer you volunteered with an organization that coordinated transnational adoptions. Could you write a paper that combines your personal interests with some of the course teachings?

Another way to begin your quest for a topic is to look for something that was not covered in class, starting from, say, materials that you have encountered in your own reading or in other classes, or issues connected with personal experience.



A temporary faith healing clinic in Quezon Province, Philippines. With the assistance of the Virgin of Sorrows and the Virgin of the Rosary, healer Jesus Vicencio (in the background) cures the sick and offers a variety of other services: finding God, fortune telling, life advice, talking to spirits, resolving legal disputes, calming the agitated, locating lost objects, enlightenment, help with conceiving children, site selection for homes or businesses, and mind-reading. Photo by Smita Lahiri.

Example: Cast a Wide Net

Let's say you come across several media articles on the growing demand for financial services in various Asian countries, and your interest is piqued. You do a scholarly search and you get too many hits; besides none of them look very anthropological. So you decide to specify your interest a bit more: are you going to look at the rise of mortgage brokerages? Investment advisors? No, it's hard to see what the cultural angle would be...You decide that life insurance might be a better prospect, figuring that people new to the practice might have mixed feelings about essentially making a bet with a company about how soon they might die. Back to Google and Google Scholar. Promising results: you find media stories about a life insurance ad campaign in India and about the increasing tendency of Indonesian pilgrims going on Haj to take out insurance policies. Google Scholar provides a number of references to articles in business journals (which may or may not be helpful), as well as a couple in of articles in anthropology journals. Bingo! You may have found a viable topic.

Develop, Motivate, and Focus Your Ideas

Once you have arrived at a promising topic, you are ready to start elaborating your ideas. At this early stage, it is important to make sure that the project you set yourself is feasible as well as *relevant*.

Feasibility: to make a topic feasible you will need to have a 'motivating question' (e.g., a thesis to prove or a question to answer) that can be addressed within the space provided. For instance, what is feasible in a 90-page senior thesis would be too much in a 7-page paper, and vice versa. Usually, the fewer pages you are allowed to write, the more specific your motivating question will need to be. For instance, if you are interested in indigenous land rights and human rights but you are only expected to write a 15-page paper, you may want to choose a specific court case through which you can examine how a particular group asserted their rights to the land. If you were to opt, instead, for a broad overview of indigenous land rights movements worldwide, your 15-page paper might end up rather shallow.

Relevance: In addition to any requirements or guidelines your course might have, your topic will also need to fall squarely within the scope of anthropology. Because anthropology is such a broad field, you will not find yourself too constrained. Bear in mind, however, that not every motivating question is appropriate. If you are interested, for instance, in writing about the Kennedy dynasty and their presence in the political life of the United States for your 20-page seminar paper, you will need to ensure that your motivating question falls within the purview of anthropology rather than, say, political science. If you were to ask something along the lines of "how the

Kennedy name affects a candidate's likelihood to be elected," your question, though important, is unlikely to culminate in an illuminating anthropological analysis. Instead, your question might be something like this: "how are cultural and social capital transmitted within the Kennedy's dynastic kinship structure?"

Be prepared for the possibility that your focus and motivation may shift during this phase of discovery as you learn more about your (still provisional) topic. Few scholars can execute a lengthy writing project without hitting a dead end or going off on a wild goose chase), but do consider taking one or more of the following steps to avoid veering too far off track:

- **Conduct a Preliminary Bibliographic Search.** Before you settle on a topic, spend some time at the library. What if you found a very interesting topic, but nobody else has ever written about it? Unless you are tackling a large, independent project, such as a senior thesis, and you can count on a lot of expert help, for your course assignments it would probably be best to stay clear of subjects about which there is no literature available. A trip to the library or an online library search are therefore very important first steps when assessing the feasibility of a topic.

- **Seek Advice.** Your instructor and/or teaching fellow should be your first stop when seeking help regarding your paper. If you are trying to learn more about a topic, though, it may also be worth it to you to talk to someone who specializes in the topic you are researching. We are quite fortunate to have prominent scholars walk the halls of our department every day, and it is very likely that the authors of some of the texts you are studying are some of our very own faculty members. So, why not going to talk to them directly about their research? Many undergraduate students feel intimidated by faculty members they do not know. In academia, however, it is very common to make contact with another scholar to discuss his or her ideas and writings. On our department website (www.fas.harvard.edu/~anthro) you will find a list of all our faculty members and graduate students, followed by a brief description of their research interests and publications. If you see someone whose life work has been about the topic you picked for your paper, it may be helpful to go talk to them. They may even help you find appropriate sources for your bibliography. Most faculty members have weekly office hours and sign up sheets posted outside their office door. Graduate students can generally be contacted by email. If there is someone you would like to meet, simply make an appointment or send them an email. If they do help you, do not forget to send them a thank you email, afterwards.

Bibliographic Research Tips

Make sure to familiarize yourself with the resources available at Harvard Libraries. Librarians are happy to schedule tours and training sessions to help you learn about the library system and electronic resources. Here, we will discuss some tips for library research specific to anthropology. Tozzer Library (Divinity Avenue) is the official anthropology library at Harvard University. There you will find most of the ethnographies and anthropological journals that you will need for your anthropology courses. The librarians at Tozzer are especially familiar with anthropological literature, and can therefore help you locate sources.

One of the major challenges of bibliographic research is not only to find sources but to discern appropriate sources. What if you decide to write about the spread of HIV/Aids in South Africa among urban youth, and a preliminary keyword search for your topic on a library database returns over 1000 hits? Your challenge will be to discriminate among those results, and find the “good” ones. What makes some sources better than others? Of course, there is no fool-proof answer, as academic evaluations are often based on expert ‘judgment calls.’ There are, however, some things to consider when evaluating a source.

- Look for PEER-REVIEWED journals. Anything published on a peer-reviewed anthropological journal is probably a good bet, because it guarantees some standard of quality. If a source you found is not peer-reviewed, you might want to check with your instructor to determine if it is appropriate. The main peer-reviewed anthropology journals include, but are not limited to, the following: *American Anthropologist*; *American Ethnologist*; *Public Culture*; *Anthropology Quarterly*; *Critical Anthropology*; *Cultural Anthropology*.
- Look for an ACADEMIC PRESS. If your source is a book, make sure that it is published by an academic press (e.g., anything with a University name, as well as independent academic presses, such as Routledge). When in doubt, ask your instructor!
- Look for CITATIONS. Once you have found a good source, you can look at its bibliography to find additional texts. Similarly, after you have found a few good sources, you can compare their bibliographies to look for any overlapping. If you notice that a particular text seems to be cited by everyone else writing on the same topic, then you should probably get a hold of that text too.
- Use ONLINE DATABASES. JSTOR, Anthrosource, and Project Muse are some of the top online databases for anthropology that you have access to as a registered Harvard student. In addition, Google Scholar and Wikipedia are free internet databases that are gaining increasing popularity among academics.

Researching the Paper

Once you have found a topic, you have specified a relevant ‘motivating question’, and you have checked to make sure that it is feasible in the allotted number of pages, you are ready to start your paper.

In most cases, unless the instructor has included a practicum component in the course, you will not be conducting fieldwork for your written assignments. However, many of the texts you will be assigned to read are based on field research, and you will be expected to be able to evaluate the research methods, data, evidence, and arguments of each (see sections II and III of this guide). Here are some additional strategies that you should consider adopting:

- ***Compile an Annotated Bibliography.*** An annotated bibliography is a bibliography in which every citation is followed by a brief (2–3 sentence) summary of that text and of how it relates to your paper topic. Instead of sorting all entries by author’s last name, for your annotated bibliography you can sort your citations by sub-topics if you wish (e.g., “works about Brazil;” “works about Bolivia”), and then sort by author within each section. This will help you start organizing your material and outlining your paper.
- ***Draft a Paper Proposal.*** In some courses with a long final paper, you might be asked to submit a paper proposal by an earlier deadline; even if it is not required, the exercise is well worth the time and effort involved. The purpose of the proposal is to get you started on your research and writing with plenty of time to spare for possible changes, and to give you early feedback. Generally, a paper proposal should not be more than 2–3 double-spaced pages, and should include the following: a paper title; a discussion of your topic, motivating questions, and possible conclusions; and a list of works you have consulted or are planning to consult. A paper abstract can serve a similar purpose to a proposal in a shorter form (typically a paragraph or 200–300 words).
- ***Seek Early Feedback.*** Take advantage of any opportunity to receive early feedback. If for some reason your topic does not end up working out (e.g., you cannot find enough literature, or you have trouble understanding some of the relevant course material), you want to make sure you have plenty of time to revise it before the deadline. In some courses instructors will offer to read early drafts or paper proposals (if you are unsure, just ask!). In some seminars, there might be a week devoted to an in-class paper workshop. Depending on specific course policies, you may even be allowed to exchange help and ideas with your classmates (but always make sure to ask your instructors first if you have any questions about plagiarism policies). It is well worth it to do some extra work ahead of time to prepare an outline or an early draft, and avoid any unpleasant surprises after the deadline.

Drafting and Revising

After you have finalized your topic and conducted the necessary research, you are ready to begin writing. Obviously, many of the characteristics of a “good” paper are not specific to anthropology. Having a coherent argument, supporting your claims with adequate evidence, and writing correctly and effectively are considered strengths in most disciplines. Before you begin to write for anthropology, it may therefore be advisable for you to review some of the bases of academic writing in general. At the Harvard Expository Writing Center you can find guidance and materials to help you improve your writing and overcome common obstacles, such as writer’s block, argumentation, or grammar.

Nota Bene: Using and Citing Sources

- **Bibliography.** Although most instructors insist only that you use a single citation style consistently (MLA, APA, etc.), anthropology papers generally use American Anthropologist style and we recommend using AA style. (You can download a copy of the American Anthropological Association Style Guide at this URL: http://aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm.) For specific advice on using and citing sources in a paper, see Gordon Harvey’s *Writing with Sources*, which is available on the Expository Writing Program’s website. For advice on using internet sources effectively and responsibly, see the Expository Writing Program’s booklet *Writing with Internet Sources*, also available on the program’s website.
- **Bibliographic software.** You should consider using bibliographic software such as Endnote or Refworks to compile a database of sources you use in your papers. These programs allow you to accumulate a catalog of the sources you have used in your anthropology courses, and to cite such sources accurately and with ease.
- **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism refers to using sources in your papers that are not properly acknowledged and cited. You should know that Harvard College takes plagiarism very seriously, and students found to have committed plagiarism are generally suspended from the College for one year. See the relevant sections of *Writing with Internet Sources* and *Writing with Sources* for more specific guidance on avoiding plagiarism.

V. OTHER WRITING SUPPORT RESOURCES

Harvard has several campus resources to support student writers.

★ Harvard University Writing Center in Barker Center 019 (495-1655)

www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/

Pre-scheduled conferences with trained peer tutors are offered Monday through Friday during the day; drop-in hours are offered from 7 to 9 PM Monday through Thursday at the Barker Center, and on Sunday evenings during the academic year from 7 to 9 PM in Room 209 at Hilles Library. (During the week, you need to arrive no later than 8 PM to guarantee a slot.) You are also welcome to drop in during the day, and, if one of the tutors is free, he or she will gladly meet with you at that time.

★ Bureau of Study Counsel (495-2581)

www.fas.harvard.edu/~bsc

The Bureau of Study Counsel offers students help with some common academic problems. There are workshops available about reading, writing, procrastinating, time management, and other academic issues. The Bureau also offers individual counseling, both academic and personal, as well as peer tutoring, and other services.

★ House Tutors in Academic Writing

Several undergraduate houses have resident or non-resident writing tutors (Expos preceptors) who hold regular drop-in hours to tutor students on their writing. Contact your house's Allston-Burr Resident Dean for further information.

★ Lamont Library's website for student writers

<http://hcl.harvard.edu/lamont/resources/links/citation.html>

Online Writing Guides

• *Writing with Sources:*

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/writing_with_sources.zip

• *Writing with Internet Sources:*

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/writing_with_internet_sources.pdf

• *Making the Most of College Writing*

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/EWP_guide.web.pdf